



## Adding a Little Kick: The 22d Chemical Battalion Takes Physical Fitness to a New Level

*By Ms. Chanel S. Weaver*

At 6:15 a.m., sounds on the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, are few, but distinct. A bird chirps to signal the start of the new day. A car moves along Magnolia Road—its occupant undoubtedly on his way to work. And on a side street, a first lieutenant's authoritative voice can be heard shouting into the predawn air. "Everybody, listen up!" she says—her voice as loud as necessary to get her Soldiers' attention. Then, she delivers a safety briefing to the Soldiers of A Company, 22d Chemical Battalion (Technical Escort), as they prepare for a workout.

Physical and mental fitness have long been pillars of the U.S. Army. Like many other Army units, A Company is committed to physical fitness; so it is no surprise that they gathered for an early morning workout. But this was no ordinary workout. Two A Company teams were preparing to compete in a two-mile race—while dressed in full personal protective equipment (PPE) (chemical suits, gas masks, gloves, and boots). In addition, this workout required that the participants stop and respond to a simulated chemical situation every quarter mile.

The workout, referred to as "Responder's Challenge," was organized by the lieutenant—a battalion team leader. "We wanted to combine physical fitness and combat-focused training and test the ability of each team to conduct chemical response," she said.

The mission of the 22d Chemical Battalion is to provide chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives (CBRNE) response in support of military operations and civil authorities. And the unit is no stranger to deployment; members of the command have mobilized to Iraq and Afghanistan numerous times in support of the War on Terrorism.

The clock begins, and the first team races toward the quarter-mile point, where they find a casualty (mannequin)

lying on the road. They load the victim on a litter and run the next quarter mile. At the half-mile point, they treat a victim who has been exposed to a nerve agent; they safely cut away the victim's outer clothing. As they continue, they stop to seal a chemical leak, drop off a chemical round, take samples, and transport hazmat—all jobs that they routinely perform as CBRNE warriors. Before reaching the finish line, they must pause to answer a technical question posed by a staff sergeant. They receive an all clear as they finish the course.

As the perspiration-drenched first team begins to remove their PPE, they are reminded that nothing in the Army is accomplished alone. "Help your buddy out!" the staff sergeant yells; and the Soldiers help each other remove their PPE. Catching his breath, one participant said, "The training was good. The scenarios were realistic and caused you to 'think on your feet.'"

The first team, which was comprised of A Company veterans, finished the course in 48 minutes; the second team, comprised mainly of new members of the unit, lost by 5 minutes.

As the sun rose a little higher in the sky and traffic in the area began to pick up, the Soldiers agreed that their success that morning was due to their dedication and perseverance. According to one participant, "You've got to . . . go deep and pull out everything that's inside of you." 

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